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SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV NATO RS
SUBJECT: RUSSIA RETHINKS ITS PARTNERSHIP WITH NATO

Classified By: Ambassador John R. Beyrle. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶11. (C) Summary. Russia attempted to beat NATO to the punch, preemptively announcing that it would suspend military cooperation with NATO and individual NATO members, but would continue supporting the Alliance's mission in Afghanistan for the time being. The announcement followed consultations between President Medvedev and Russia's NATO Ambassador Dmitriy Rogozin. Officials blame NATO for treating Russia as an unequal partner and supporting Georgia in the South Ossetian conflict. In doing so, they cite arms shipments to Georgia, the NAC Foreign Ministers' statement on Georgia, and NATO's decision to suspend the NATO-Russia Council while Russian troops remain in Georgia. Medvedev and Rogozin stated that the extent of Russia's future cooperation with NATO depended on decisions by the Alliance. Although Russia will continue to support ISAF for the time being, officials may seek to play an Afghanistan card as discussions over resupplying Georgian defenses advance. End Summary.

Russia Clarifies Its NATO Position

¶12. (SBU) In an effort to beat NATO to the punch, Russia informed NATO on August 23 that it would suspend its military cooperation with the Alliance and individual Alliance members. At first, Russia confirmed that it would cancel all remaining military activities on the 2008 NATO-Russia Council (NRC) Work Plan. On August 27, Rogozin clarified that all military cooperation would suffer. Additional measures Russia would take include:

- Postponing high-level visits of the representatives of NATO's military leadership to Russia;
- Suspending NATO and individual Allied ship visits to Russian ports;
- Postponing consultations to draw up a normative and legal basis for NATO-Russian military relations;
- Limiting the operational compatibility between Russian and NATO forces;
- Reducing educational and research exchanges for military personnel and specialists;
- Reducing the participation of Russian military representatives in sessions of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Military Committee.

¶13. (C) As for possible consequences outside the NATO-Russia military channel, Rogozin commented that the NATO Information Office in Moscow, which "turned into a bulwark in the

information war during the conflict," should be closed. Officials at the Office told us that they had read Rogozin's comments, but had not received official notification to shut down operations; they will continue to operate on a normal schedule. Rogozin also claimed that Russia planned to continue to participate in the various NRC working groups, focusing particular attention on the benefits of the Cooperative Airspace Initiative Working Group. However, despite Rogozin's reassurances that Russia would keep these contacts open, he also announced that Russian NATO representatives would be meeting with NATO Deputy Secretary General Martin Erdmann today to discuss a "new format for NATO-Russian cooperation." MFA NATO Desk officials did not have additional information.

¶4. (C) Regarding Afghanistan, Rogozin confirmed that Russia would continue to support the ISAF mission. (Note: Yesterday, Russian Ambassador to Afghanistan Kabulov claimed Russia would stop its cooperation with NATO in Afghanistan, nullifying the Transit Agreement, which allows non-military equipment to transit Russian territory, and preventing access to Russian airspace for Allied airplanes. MFA contacts on the Afghanistan and NATO desks asserted that Kabulov's comments should not be considered official GOR policy, and that the Ambassador might have been referencing "conditional measures" that could be implemented should relations between NATO and Russia deteriorate even further. End Note.) Rogozin and Deputy Chief of the Russian General Staff Anatoliy Nogovitsyn did acknowledge that Russia could reverse its decision vis-a-vis ISAF if relations between NATO and Russia deteriorate even further.

Officials Downplay Need for NATO

¶5. (U) Senior officials have downplayed the effects of Russia's ruptured relationship with NATO. President Medvedev claimed that Russia did not need "the illusion of partnership," and it was wrong for the Alliance to think Russia needed it more than it needed Russia. He added, "We can say 'goodbye' to each other and it won't be a tragedy." Medvedev also referenced well-known Russian grievances, such as NATO bases along Russia's borders and NATO enlargement, to justify a potential severing of relations. In the Duma, Chairman of the International Relations Committee Konstantin Kosachev was slightly more diplomatic, stating that Russia does need a partnership with NATO, "but not at any price." Kosachev cited a difference in values between Russia and NATO, considering the latter's support for Georgia's military engagement in South Ossetia, and implied Russia could not have a relationship with NATO when the Transatlantic value system differed to such a degree.

Comment

¶6. (C) Russia continues to keep the door open to cooperation in areas where it has a compelling strategic interest. However, as discussions advance over NATO support - including member states' bilateral efforts - to resupply Georgian defense, we expect Russian spokesmen to raise the directness and volume of their so far masked threats to play the Afghanistan card.

BEYRLE